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## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

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### I.

**JOINT RESOLUTION :—**Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

*Whereas* the first President of the United States was not inaugurated until the thirtieth day of April, in the year seventeen hundred and eighty-nine ; and

*Whereas* the day which was chosen by the Continental Congress for the installation of the new Government then established by the Constitution, the fourth day of March, does now cause a public inconvenience in unduly curtailing and limiting the second session of every Congress ; and

*Whereas* it is fitting that the one hundredth anniversary of the inauguration of George Washington as the first President of the United States be commemorated by the inauguration of his successor in eighteen hundred and eighty-nine upon the same day, and that this should be the day, hereafter, for the beginning of successive administrations of the Government ; therefore,

*Resolved* by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article be proposed to the legislatures of the several States as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, as part of the Constitution, namely :

#### *Article XVI.*

The term of office of the President and the second session of the Fiftieth Congress shall continue until the thirtieth day of April in the year eighteen hundred and eighty-nine ; and the thirtieth of April shall thereafter be substituted for the fourth of March as the commencement of the official term of the successive Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Congresses of the United States.

This preamble and joint resolution was prepared by Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, and Judge Nott, of the Court of Claims, who first advanced the idea of changing the date of the inauguration of the President. At the suggestion of Hon. Horatio King, I introduced it in the Senate, March 15th, and, on the 3d inst., it was favorably reported by Senator Hoar from the Committee on Privileges and Elections. Should it be adopted by two-thirds of both Houses, and ratified by the Legislatures of thirty States before March 4, 1889, it will be valid as part of the Constitution.

The selection of March 4th as the original date for the initiation of the Congressional and Presidential terms was arbitrary. The Constitution only declared their duration, but, after New Hampshire, the ninth State, ratified that instrument, June 21, 1788, the Congress of the Confederation passed an act nam-

ing New York as the place, and the first Wednesday of the following March as the day, for setting the new government in operation. Owing to lack of facilities for travel, and the indifference of the people, a quorum of the two Houses was not obtained till April 6th, to count the electoral votes. Further time was consumed in arranging the forms and methods of the ceremony, so that the oath of office was not administered to President Washington till April 30, 1789.

But the 4th of March remained as the initial period, and the terms being fixed by the Constitution, the date can only be changed by amendment and not by law.

The human mind is pleased with anniversaries, and the proposed change appeals to the imagination with much force, as suggested in the preamble ; but there are many substantial reasons for its adoption. It will diminish the interregnum of nine months, between March 4th and the first Monday in December, during which Congress is not organized.

It will also add two months to the closing session of every Congress, which now ends March 4th, crowding all the business of each alternate year into about seventy days, with great detriment both to the character and the amount of legislation.

It will give a longer interval for the subsidence of popular excitement after each Presidential election and afford the President greater opportunity for recovery from the fatigues of the campaign, for deliberation in the selection of his Cabinet, and the determination of his policy.

It will contribute largely to the public health, comfort, convenience and pleasure. The inauguration of our Presidents is the national occasion for imposing pageantry, parade and demonstration. The tendency to display increases with our population and with the enlarged facilities for reaching the Capital. It has valuable uses and should be encouraged. For these purposes no time could be so unfavorable as the 4th of March in Washington. It is neither winter nor spring. The weather is usually inclement, blustering and harsh. It is said that President Harrison died from cold contracted by exposure on the day he was inaugurated. Those who remember General Grant, as he stood bareheaded on the eastern portico on the 4th of March, 1873, delivering his second inaugural in a furious northern blast, with the temperature nearly at zero, will need no other argument for the change of date. Hayes and Garfield were not much more fortunate. Cleveland happened to have a sunny, vernal day, but it was the only one of the entire season. The 30th of April finds spring well advanced in this latitude, and the landscape wears its most entrancing aspect. The tumultuous splendors of inauguration at this season would find an appropriate counterpart in the exalting glories of the advancing year.

The only objection thus far urged against the amendment is that it will give two additional months of power to the present administration. Whether this argument will appeal most strongly to democrats or republicans does not yet appear. The President seems to be regarded with equal indifference by his friends and by his enemies.

JOHN J. INGALLS.

## II.

If a maker of dainty little Dresden China figures were to climb to the house-top, once a month, and pompously make proclamation that his art surpassed in value that of the Greeks, and that the day of the Venus of Milo and of the Elgin marbles had passed, and that the age demanded a finer art, he would excite wild hilarity, and would be laughed at as a fanatic or a lunatic.

Yet such a spectacle would be no more ludicrous than that which is presented once a month by Mr. W. D. Howells, when he, a writer of *bric-à-brac* social studies, sneers at such masters of the art of fiction as Scott, Thackeray, Hawthorne, Dickens and Balzac. What a fellow-feeling Mr. Howells would have for him, if, from his lofty perch in the Study, he should see the little image-maker, and should hear him railing at Phidias, Praxiteles, and Michael Angelo! But there is little likelihood that our author would discern the diminutive, noisy iconoclast. For the curtains are closely drawn. We know this because he has taken us there. He has told us that the view from his Study windows is all comprehensive, and invited us to enter and look over the prospect and chat with him about authors and books, and the literary tendencies of the times. We hoped and expected, from the form of his invitation, to find him, telescope in hand, ready to take a broad, whole-souled, generous, hearty view of all that was good in literature the world over. What did we find? The heavy curtains shut out the warm, genial sunlight. A single small stick blazed feebly on the hearth, adding, by its mockery, to the chill of the room. The air was laden with the perfume of incense brought by pilgrims from Boston, the echoes of whose words of flattery still lingered in the corners of the book-cases. The atmosphere, to one coming from the bracing winds outside, was enervating. But not so with our host; he has waxed fat and grown rich upon it. We found him with a strong magnifying-glass, instead of a telescope, in hand, and he was examining, with eagerness and with a critical eye, something which he had imprisoned beneath a watch crystal on the smooth surface of the inlaid table. When asked what it was that he was gazing at so intently, he replied that he had beneath the glass the "mind of a society girl;" he had discovered sixteen conflicting emotions regarding the sort of a dress she should wear at the ball (in his novel, of course,) that evening, and he was searching for the seventeenth with all the excitement with which Galileo searched for the satellites of Jupiter.

The languid voice of the St. Botolph clubman is heard, however, in faint protest, that we are drawing a portrait of an imaginary Mr. Howells, not of the real Mr. Howells. The picture, as a matter of fact, is under, rather than over-drawn. That this is so, may be safely left to the judgment of intelligent men, who, in considering the scope and drift of Mr. Howells' criticisms, are not prevented by personal friendship from deducing honest conclusions from plain statements. Mr. Howells, announced a few years ago, that the art of fiction had become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray, and that "we could not suffer the confidential attitude of the *latter* now, nor the mannerism of the *former*." Latterly, however, he has expounded his theory of fiction more fully. He declares that heroes and heroines are "abnormal beings," "barbaric survivals;" that the old romantic ideals are false; that the real

sacrifices of life have been offered for races, not for persons; that there is no such thing as genius as distinguished, presumably, from the talent by which a man, working from nine A. M. till one P. M., six days in the week, is able, year in and year out, to follow one serial story with another without a break; that "human feelings as God made them and as men know them," however vapid, fine-spun and wearisome, are good enough for novel-readers; that there need be no incident in a story, and neither more plot nor less than there is in the experience of God's creatures generally; and that the day is passed for verifying the externals of life, and for portraying the outside of men and things. Mr. Howells argues, in effect, that the truth as it is exemplified in "Daisy Miller," in "A Woman's Reason," in "Mark Rutherford," and in "Indian Summer," is so vastly superior in point of contemporaneous human interest to the truth as it was in those shallow fellows who could not penetrate below the surface of things—Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, Balzac, and (Heaven save the mark!) Hawthorne—that presently the critics will come to see the inferiority of the old and the rare excellence of the new; and then "all will have been changed!"

Was the note of inordinate, exasperating egotism ever struck so fairly and so loudly by any other son of Ohio—that mother of great and self-all-sufficient men? The air of superciliousness and self-satisfaction with which Mr. Howells makes such dogmatic assertions, praising and advertising himself, as witness the Stedman episode, and sneering at authors whose books will be read with eagerness and pleasure when his are covered with the dust of years, is becoming fairly nauseating. He may not know it, but the fact is that thousands who have been unknown friends of his have been disgusted with his arrogant, conceited tone as a critic. If, as apparently is the case, his modesty and good-breeding in the discussion of literary questions are leaving him, common sense ought to teach him that he can ill afford to lose the sympathy and goodwill of his audience by going out of his way to deride the masters of the art of fiction. Mr. Howells has made many friends by his writings. His light and airy sketches, delicately shaded and wrought out with the greatest skill, will have their place, for a time, in literature. No writer has shown a cleverness equal to his in investing the commonplaces and frivolities of life with a certain indefinite, vague, elusive charm. None has been able to reproduce so accurately and to dress in such a perfect literary style the random, insipid gossip of a "Five o'clock." None has given us a more refined picture of the skim-milk-and-water passions and inconsequential motives that shape the conduct, from day to day, of the sentimental, vacillating society girl or of the back-boneless young man, who "drifts" aimlessly and wearily in and out of the story. His creations, or, to speak more accurately, his note-book characters, exert themselves to glorify the commonplaces of every-day life. Others may take pleasure in Mr. Howells' pages, but, from the very necessity of things, commonplace people he wholly satisfies. They see themselves in his characters, and feel flattered by the choice that the author has made. Their lives consist of uninteresting trivialities. No unwelcome, disturbing "incident" ever gains entrance to their drawing-rooms. Indeed, they were shocked when the carriage went over the wall and Colville "felt himself whirled into the air and then swung ruining down into the writhing and crashing heap at the bottom of the wall."

They knew well whom Mr. Howells learned that poor business of, and hoped he would never descend to such a vulgar device again. Their thoughts flow in shallow, endless channels. Their range of vision is bounded by portières and Japanese screens. They are taught that to become emotional or enthusiastic over anything is "bad form." They are not troubled with any high moral ideas or with any old-fashioned, romantic notions about love. "Business is business" with them, as with Belinda in the play. They shudder at the thought of doing anything that shall cause them to be regarded as heroes or heroines, and have no desire to sacrifice themselves, except, perchance, for the salvation of the African or Indian race.

Over such people Mr. Howells' influence is boundless; with them his word is law. But as the proclaimer of a new truth, as the advocate of a new theory of fiction, his ambition ought to be to win converts to his way of thinking. A show, even if the real thing were wanting, of modesty, temperance and generosity in his treatment of authors to whom the world has given the highest praise, would have been becoming and would have helped his cause. For some of us have a pretty store of prejudices in favor of the writers to whom Mr. Howells refers in tones of lofty contempt, and many of us are acquiring a pretty store of grudges against the man whose presumption will not allow him to recognize these prejudices as having any good reason for being. It is only with the greatest difficulty that one can believe that so intelligent a man as Mr. Howells honestly holds such opinions as he advances. If he is honest in it, the only explanation of his extraordinary course is that his success and the feminine flattery of Boston have so warped his mind that he cannot bring to the discussion of fiction and writers of fiction that disinterestedness which is the essential element of criticism of real and permanent value—criticism founded upon truth and clearness of intellectual vision. If he is not honest—if his astonishing propositions are made with a consciousness of their absurdity and of the offense that they will give, merely for the purpose of exciting controversy and in order to attract attention to himself and his books—if, in other words, it is the purely commercial spirit that animates him, no condemnation can be too severe for such an abuse of power. As he must be either honest or dishonest, we leave to his friends the task of deciding which horn of the dilemma will pain him and them the least.

The most important aspect of this question remains to be considered, and that is the probable moral effect of the teachings of Mr. Howells upon the young people of the country whose literary tastes are being formed. His influence for good or evil is wide. His words reach probably a million readers every month. He has been accepted in many quarters as the leading literary authority of America, and his opinions, if uncontradicted, may be expected to carry great weight. Thus far the protests against the doctrines which he sets forth have been, in the main, feeble and fragmentary. The presumption and tone of authority which he has assumed seem to have had a paralyzing effect on public opinion. His audacity and assurance have been stupefying, but the time has come for a most emphatic word of protest against the acceptance of the standard which he sets up. American character is flabby enough now; Mr. Howells would make it flabbier still. Courage, independence, manliness, hero-

ism and a spirit of self-sacrifice are qualities that he never gives his characters, and that he sneers at as antiquated or obsolete in his essays. Is he to be allowed to tell the youth of America, without fear of contradiction, that the day of *Ivanhoe*, of *Henry Esmond*, of *Sydney Carton*, and of *Leatherstocking*, is passed, and that the ideals which these names represent, of honor, chivalry, bravery, generosity and self-reliance belong to a former age and are not suited to the present time? Does Mr. Howells' theory of heroism and self-sacrifice furnish as high a moral standard for the government of conduct as does the wonderful story of the unselfishness and the devotion to each other, amid suffering and death, which Greely's men showed at Cape Sabine? Is his theory sustained or disproved by the facts? Can Mr. Howells, with his recollection of how tenderly these brave men cared for poor *Elison* for months, and with a picture in his mind's eye of *Frederick's* devotion to the dying hero *Rice*, maintain with truth that self-sacrifice is nowadays made for races, not for individuals? Is he to be permitted to tell American girls that the truth as it is in *Bessie Alden*, in *Irene* and *Penelope Lapham*, in *Verena Tarrant*, in *Imogene Graham* and in *Mrs. Bowen*, is to supersede the truth as it is in *Rebecca*, in *Amy Robsart*, in *Ethel Newcome*, in *Agnes Wickfield*, and in *Hester Prynne*? Can the effect of such teaching upon the youth of the country be aught but pernicious? Will not its tendency be to offer polite imbecility as a worthy substitute for true nobility of character? And does not the manner in which Mr. Howells is exerting his influence to this deplorable end remind one of a passage in *Thackeray's* sarcastic chapter on literary snobs? "You *may*, occasionally, it is true," says the satirist, "hear one literary man abusing his brother; but why? Not in the least out of malice; not at all from envy; merely from a sense of truth and public duty."

JESSE COOLIDGE.